

Residential school survivors and leaders gather to mark demolition of St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, B.C.

Vancouver, B.C. – In a powerfully moving and emotional ceremony yesterday, hundreds of residential school survivors and their family members gathered with political leaders, First Nations leaders and Anglican Church representatives to witness the commencement of the demolition of St. Michael's Indian Residential School at the residential school site in Alert Bay, British Columbia.

More than 500 people crowded onto the former school grounds for an all-day event called *l'tustolagalis* in Kwak'wala, translated as "Rising Up, Together". School survivors gave poignant recollections of the trauma experienced by children—and their children's children—over the years. 'Namgis First Nation Chief Debra Hanuse stated that while demolishing the building does not erase the truth of what has happened, it provides an opportunity for survivors to release their grief and pain. Participants lit a sacred flame and observed a moment of silence for the children who never returned back to their homelands.

St. Michael's survivor and Reconciliation Canada Ambassador Chief Dr. Robert Joseph attended the event along with representatives including Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Union of BC Indian Chiefs Vice President Chief Bob Chamberlin, BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould, Regional Director General, BC Region, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Eric Magnuson and Bishop Dr. Logan McMenamie from the Anglican Diocese of BC.

"Through ceremony and prayer, together we take steps toward reconciliation," said National Chief Perry Bellegarde. "Witnessing the Bishop of the Anglican Church pledge to continue reconciliation and change attitudes toward First Nations is encouraging. Witnessing the release by the survivors is powerful. Seeing that some are still hurting tells us that there's more work to do. And witnessing the young people sing their songs in their language gives us all hope."

"For many years I would never have believed this day would come," said Chief Dr. Robert Joseph. "It was hard for many people to be here today but for many of us a weight has been lifted," Chief Joseph added. "To come together this way—all of us together—is a powerful message of strength, healing, hope and optimism for the future."

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About Reconciliation Canada

Born from the vision of Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawaenuk Elder, Reconciliation Canada is a charitable nonpartisan, national initiative that promotes reconciliation by engaging Canadians from every part of society in open and honest dialogue and transformative experiences that revitalize relationships among Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians. Its initiatives include reconciliation dialogue workshops, reconciliation-based leadership training, economic reconciliation dialogues, and public awareness activities. More information can be found at www.reconciliationcanada.ca.